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Statement of mutual commitments on peacebuilding in Liberia

I. Introduction

1. At the request of the Government of Liberia on 27 May 2010, Liberia was placed on the agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission. The statement of mutual commitments on peacebuilding in Liberia between the Government of Liberia and the Peacebuilding Commission was adopted on 16 November 2010 (PBC/4/LBR/2) following a Peacebuilding Commission assessment mission to Liberia. Since its adoption, progress has been made in the implementation of the commitments of both the Government of Liberia and the Peacebuilding Commission. The present updated statement of mutual commitments[1] was endorsed by the Liberia configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Government of Liberia in April 2016 and outlines the priority commitments for the engagement between them.

II. Peacebuilding priorities during current transitions in Liberia

2. Over the past decade, Liberia has achieved notable progress towards consolidating peace. Important initiatives include the strategic framework, Liberia Rising: Vision 2030; the Agenda for Transformation (2013-2017); the Strategic Road Map for National Healing, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation (2013-2030); the constitutional review process; and draft legislation related to land rights and administration, local governance, decentralization and civil service reform. The Government of Liberia plan for the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) transition was also developed in 2015. Effective implementation of these

[1] The present statement of mutual commitments on peacebuilding in Liberia is an updated version of the original statement of mutual commitments issued in 2010. The draft text was prepared by a Peacebuilding Commission and United Nations technical-level mission to Liberia in January 2016, in close consultation with, and with the assistance of, partners in the Government of Liberia, the Liberia Peacebuilding Office based in Monrovia, the United Nations Mission in Liberia, the United Nations country team and other key partners based in Liberia.

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Government initiatives remains imperative. Liberia is still recovering from the economic effects of the outbreak of the Ebola virus disease. It has also been severely impacted by the drop in commodity prices of raw materials, which have been the main sources of revenue for the economy of Liberia. At the same time, in the light of the 2017 elections, the Government needs to ensure an enabling environment for a peaceful and inclusive electoral process.

3. A number of significant transitions that will take place in the country in the coming years provide the context for the renewal of the statement of mutual commitments. The transfer of the country's security responsibilities from UNMIL to the Government of Liberia and the 2017 elections both present important opportunities and challenges for the country to demonstrate that it has furthered the consolidation of peace. In addition, the United Nations will determine the optimal form of its future presence in Liberia following the security transition in Liberia and the UNMIL drawdown.

4. Notwithstanding the important steps taken to date, significant challenges remain. A number of internal risks to sustainable peace have not yet been fully addressed, including inter-ethnic divides; socioeconomic inequality; corruption and lack of transparency and accountability; high levels of unemployment, in particular among the youth; a polarized society; mistrust of the Government and weakness of the State's presence and services outside Monrovia; land ownership disputes; mismanagement of natural resources; unrest related to the granting of natural resource concessions; a lack of access to justice; and the overall weakness of the judiciary and security institutions. At present, however, there is an opportunity to transform the relationship between the State and society in Liberia, with a progressive vision of a society that is open, inclusive, civically enriching and robustly capable of preventing conflict.

Cross-cutting issues

5. The peacebuilding priorities of the statement of mutual commitments identified below are impacted by a number of cross-cutting issues, which are important for sustainable peace in the country. The first is decentralization. In February 2015, the President of Liberia launched the national deconcentration platform, which aims to transfer the provision of public services to the county level; a key step in the implementation of decentralization. Improving social cohesion, building the social contract and ensuring the delivery of peace dividends also remain critical to the peace consolidation and peacebuilding processes in Liberia.

6. Furthermore, with an overwhelmingly young population,[2] opportunities for education, participation and the development of social skills are critical for the youth, in particular the disabled, so that they can enter the formal economy and lead productive lives. This is key to revitalizing the economy and ensuring that young women and young men fully realize their potential to contribute to peace consolidation.

7. Gender equality and women's empowerment are also transverse themes. Broad and equal participation of women across political and socioeconomic spheres remains critical to consolidating peace. The high levels of violence, including

[2] Seventy-nine per cent of the population is under the age of 36 (Liberia Demographic and Health Survey 2013).

sexual and gender-based violence and domestic violence, which continue to be perpetrated against children, youth and women, are a continuing testament to the persistent culture of impunity and deeply entrenched inequalities.

III. Peacebuilding priorities

8. The peacebuilding priority areas identified in the present statement of mutual commitments are security sector development; strengthening the rule of law; promoting national reconciliation; and peaceful and inclusive elections in 2017. While substantial progress has been made by the Government of Liberia and its partners in those areas since the initiation of the statement of mutual commitments in 2010, additional support will strengthen and ensure the sustainability of the security transition in Liberia.

9. The Government of Liberia has adopted a people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented approach to security that strengthens the protection and empowerment of all people and all communities, in order to help to identify and address widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood, safety and dignity of its people. This broader approach to enhancing security is based on national ownership and strengthens national solutions that are compatible with local realities. It also recognizes the interlinkages between peace, security, development and human rights, and equally considers civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Furthermore, the approach entails a focus on stronger State-society linkages for peacebuilding processes, including through strengthening the national human rights protection system, political inclusion and access to services and providing greater economic opportunity, particularly for women and youth of diverse backgrounds, by means of building upon the priority areas addressed below.

Security sector development

10. In the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Liberia and the Agenda for Transformation, the Government of Liberia has set out the future direction of the security sector. In the National Security Strategy, citizens are placed at the centre of a new arrangement that focuses on human rights as the cardinal ingredient of national security and aims to address security in a humane and holistic fashion. It is further underlined that responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security in Liberia is jointly shared between citizens and the State. In the Agenda for Transformation, the current operational inefficiencies of the security agencies in Liberia are recognized, including a lack of human capacity, insufficient coordination and the centralization in Monrovia of justice and security provision as well as endemic corruption, impunity and lack of accountability. In the Agenda, the Government of Liberia calls for political will, the nurturing of a culture of community service, an increase in domestic budgetary allocations, changes in social norms and values, enhanced participation by all sectors of society and the creation of accountability mechanisms. The Agenda is in the process of being reviewed by the Government in order to take into account current trends and critically important factors, such as the drawdown of UNMIL and post-Ebola outbreak recovery.

Strengthening the rule of law

11. Key goals set out in the Agenda for Transformation include building the effectiveness and integrity of legal institutions, increasing equitable access to justice and strengthening of the rule of law. While progress has been made with the support of the United Nations and other international partners, a considerable number of challenges remain in Liberia that undermine the confidence of its citizens in the justice system. Systemic weaknesses in the criminal justice system include limited internal oversight, weak administrative procedures, inadequate budgetary allocations, an outdated legal framework, the lack of a strategy for reforms and limited human and institutional capacity. In addition, the relationship and delineation between the statutory and customary justice systems remain undefined. Such weaknesses result in a lack of public confidence in the ability of the justice system to uphold the rule of law and maintain public safety. They also cause prolonged pretrial detentions, resulting in overcrowding and poor conditions in prisons, and fragile prison security.

12. In the light of the security transition in Liberia, it will be critical to identify the funding needs for achieving the key objectives in the areas of the statement of mutual commitments pillars over the medium to long term in order to inform the allocation of Government resources and guide international support.

Promoting national reconciliation

13. In the Strategic Road Map for National Healing, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation (2013-2030), after extensive national consultations, reconciliation in the Liberia context was defined as a multidimensional process for overcoming social, political and religious cleavages; mending and transforming relationships; healing the physical and psychological wounds from the civil war; and confronting and addressing historical and structural wrongs, in particular those that are the root causes of conflict, such as ethno-politics, religious, social and regional exclusion, corruption, impunity and human rights violations. Effectively addressing those issues is critical to the promotion of broader security through improving the wellbeing of individuals and communities.

14. The Strategic Road Map for National Healing, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation (2013-2030) has been aligned with Liberia's Vision 2030 and other ongoing peacebuilding and State-building processes. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2015, also provides a blueprint for the implementation of the Road Map. The Government of Liberia proposes to adjust the Road Map to respond more effectively to multiple social and economic issues, including poverty, social cohesion and local governance. Doing so will help to create or strengthen local resilience to conflict through effective dispute resolution mechanisms, food security and access to livelihoods and basic and public services. The Government also aims to scale up efforts that have been under way since 2011 to strengthen local and traditional mechanisms for peace by restructuring and decentralizing county peace committees to the district level, or in some cases to the community level, and develop a national early warning and early response mechanism to efficiently anticipate and rapidly respond to threats. Ensuring that women and men have equal access to those committees and addressing women's grievances (in particular those related to gender-based violence) are also essential.

The linkages between ongoing reforms, such as decentralization and constitutional reform, need to be heightened to realize sustainable peace and reconciliation.

Peaceful and inclusive elections in 2017

15. Liberia has already tested and renewed its democracy through the successful conduct of presidential elections in 2005 and 2011, as well as legislative elections in 2011 and 2014. The 2017 elections, however, represent a particularly significant opportunity for further democratic consolidation through a peaceful transition. While the Government and the National Elections Commission have already begun the process of preparing for the elections, it is imperative that the preparations be premised on a realistic estimation of costs that takes into account both the requirements for democratic elections in Liberia and the country's reduced fiscal space. If successfully conducted, the 2017 elections could have the potential to contribute to the further improvement of governance, reconciliation and security in the country. Doing so will depend upon the effective implementation by the Government and the National Elections Commission of concerted efforts to enable the widest possible public awareness of and participation in the forthcoming elections through well-diffused civic and voter education. It will similarly depend upon the deployment of preventive measures, ranging from enhanced and streamlined formal mechanisms for electoral dispute resolution to the ensuring of regular channels for dialogue between the security forces and the population, including women and youth.

IV. Mutual commitments

16. The Government of Liberia and the Peacebuilding Commission commit to the following actions/priorities in support of peacebuilding efforts in Liberia. In doing so, both parties recognize that the primary responsibility for peace consolidation and development rests with the Government and people of Liberia.

A. Commitments by the Government of Liberia

Security sector development

17. The commitments by the Government are:

(a) To accelerate the implementation of the Government of Liberia plan for UNMIL transition and prioritize a whole-Government approach to completing the security transition in a timely manner by the deadline of 30 June 2016;

(b) To enhance security sector architecture and governance by expediting legislative and policy reform, including the passage and implementation of the Police Act, Immigration Services Act, and Firearms and Ammunition Control Act, and by undertaking organizational reform that includes the restructuring, right-sizing, gender mainstreaming and decentralization of security sector institutions;

(c) To ensure adequate budgetary allocations to build the capacity of institutions central to security and rule of law;

(d) To enhance community engagement in the security sector, including regularizing dialogue mechanisms with communities, ensuring the participation of

women and youth representatives, through coordinated partnerships, effective civilian oversight of the security sector, information sharing and early-warning mechanisms;

(e) To develop a strategic approach to addressing regional security issues and transnational crime, including by developing regional and international partnerships and supporting the West Africa Coast Initiative, in the light of Liberia's vulnerability to drug, arms and human trafficking and illicit financial flows;

(f) To carry out a financial review, building on the 2013 public expenditure review, in order to determine minimum financial needs and the allocation of government resources over the next five years for the reform, restructuring and effective functioning of the security sector so as to provide for the protection of the population and similarly for the rule of law, national reconciliation and the elections in 2017.

Strengthening the rule of law

18. The commitments by the Government are:

(a) To address long-standing, systemic weaknesses in the criminal justice sector in line with nationally validated recommendations;

(b) To advance the passage and implementation of key legislation such as the Land Rights Act, the Land Authority Act, the Local Governance Act, the Gender Equity Bill, the Whistle Blowers Protection Act and the Corrupt Offences Act;

(c) To advance the constitutional reform process in a timely manner, ensuring robust civic education and civil society engagement;

(d) To harmonize the traditional and statutory justice systems, including through the preparation of new legislation, in view of the constitutional provision that all persons are equal before the law and thus entitled to equal treatment thereunder, especially as related to the laws that govern throughout the country to guarantee access to justice to all Liberians;

(e) To advance transitional justice by supporting a robust public information campaign regarding accountability in foreign courts for international humanitarian law and international human rights law violations committed in Liberia, bringing in two special procedures mandate holders, the mandates of which encompass transitional justice, the right to truth and guarantees of non-recurrence.

Promoting national reconciliation

19. The commitments by the Government are:

(a) To expedite the revision and implementation of the Strategic Road Map for National Healing, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation (2013-2030), including the national history project and the review of national symbols, to foster national unity;

(b) To ensure the implementation of legislation aimed at decentralization and land reform, including the Local Government Act, to rebuild and maintain public trust in the Government and its institutions while enhancing social cohesion and addressing inter-group tensions, especially in preparation for the presidential election in 2017, and for the bills on land rights and the Liberia Land Authority,

which will ensure the security of land tenure for the majority of Liberians and improve land administration, respectively;

(c) To support the role of the Peacebuilding Office in Monrovia in coordination and collaboration to ensure the Government's development and implementation of peace and reconciliation programmes;

(d) To strengthen the capacity of key institutions to advance national dialogue on peace and reconciliation, as recommended in the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and prioritize interventions aimed at empowering the youth and women;

(e) To revise and implement the peacebuilding and reconciliation outreach and communications plan intended to mobilize mass citizen support for and participation in the implementation of the Government's peacebuilding and reconciliation programmes;

(f) To provide targeted support, for example through social cohesion initiatives, to civil society organizations, including community-based organizations, in particular women and youth organizations at the local level, to enable them to participate in the planning and implementation of various peacebuilding and reconciliation programmes across the country.

Promoting peaceful and inclusive elections in 2017

20. The commitments by the Government are:

(a) To prepare an electoral budget based on a realistic assessment of Liberia's ability to sustain financial and operational requirements for the elections;

(b) To take steps to increase the representation of women in elected institutions;

(c) To implement a broad campaign of civic education and voter education that connects themes of democratic participation and inclusion to broader questions of reconciliation, the rule of law and security within the overall context of peace consolidation;

(d) To put in place a set of dialogue mechanisms between entities within the security forces that will be engaged in providing security for the 2017 elections and the population at the community level, with a particular focus on the participation of both young women and young men;

(e) To ensure that the security agencies providing security for the elections are properly trained and prepared and that the necessary funding is received on time and encourage the establishment of a code of conduct between the presidential candidates.

Human rights

21. The commitments of the Government are:

(a) To implement the national human rights action plan and the recommendations contained in the universal periodic review report on Liberia (A/HRC/30/4);

(b) To capacitate the Independent National Commission on Human Rights to carry out its mandate in line with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles).

B. Commitments by the Peacebuilding Commission

22. The support of the Peacebuilding Commission to the national peacebuilding efforts of Liberia will include political advocacy and accompaniment, advocating for the generation of necessary resources and fostering coordinated actions among all relevant stakeholders. The Commission will continue to promote an integrated, strategic and coherent approach to peacebuilding and serve as a forum for dialogue for all relevant actors. Furthermore, the Peacebuilding Commission is committed to the following strategic objectives and will work closely with the Government of Liberia and other partners:

(a) To generate sustained attention and undertake measures to advocate within the international community for support to the peacebuilding process by highlighting progress in, as well as challenges, risks and opportunities of, peacebuilding efforts in the country;

(b) To advocate for the generation of necessary resources for the peacebuilding priorities identified in the statement of mutual commitments;

(c) To generate and sustain international attention and support for the 2017 elections;

(d) To continue its political accompaniment role to sustain attention to peacebuilding-related issues as part of the ongoing security transition in Liberia;

(e) To encourage the wide participation of partners, including civil society, in Peacebuilding Commission activities through which support can be garnered for Liberia;

(f) To advocate for the importance of equal participation of women, the youth and the disabled in all spheres of political, economic, social and cultural life as an essential condition for a fair and inclusive society;

(g) To work with regional actors, in particular the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States and the Mano River Union, and rely upon their interventions in building durable peace in Liberia;

(h) To advise the Government and people of Liberia on lessons learned from experience gained in similar situations in other countries while providing political leverage to help ensure the successful implementation of the related processes;

(i) In advance of Security Council deliberations on the future mandate of the United Nations presence in Liberia, to contribute to those deliberations by convening a multi-stakeholder forum on Liberia to discuss peacebuilding priorities and, on that basis, provide succinct and targeted advice on those priorities to the Security Council, if requested;

(j) To contribute to supporting Liberia in its peacebuilding efforts by collaborating closely with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, UNMIL, the United Nations country team as well as international partners, including international financial institutions, on the above commitments; encouraging

effective coordination between the United Nations and other actors with respect to supporting the implementation of national strategies; and reaching out to other relevant international stakeholders.

V. Review of engagement between the Government of Liberia and the Peacebuilding Commission

23. The Government of Liberia and the Peacebuilding Commission agree to undertake an initial review of the present statement of mutual commitments within a year of its adoption and a more thorough review within a year of the installation of the new Government.